

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Interview by Ken Adelman

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The Only Way to Play

*Edward Bennett Williams on Contest Living,
Courtroom Strategy, His Fight Against Cancer*

EXCERPTED

Edward Bennett Williams is a Washington monument. He became one of the nation's foremost trial lawyers early in life. He later branched out into sports—owning part of the Washington Redskins and all of the Baltimore Orioles—and into politics as a prominent Democratic party leader.

About ten years ago, he added a fourth challenge, battling cancer, which he's done with characteristic determination. He is no stranger to health problems; when he was in the Army Air Force, his training plane crashed, killing everyone else and leaving Williams with a concussion. For a man with his medical history, he looks, at 67, remarkably fit.

The long halls of his law office are lined with a host of honorary degrees; awards such as one from *Time* naming him the top criminal lawyer of 1967, and photos of him with recent Presidents. He still works like a dog. He's said that he has only two speeds: none and full. So far, it's been full all the way. Recently, over three separate sessions, he sat in his downtown office, in front of windows looking out on Farragut Square, and talked about what he's learned. He seems to have put all the disparate elements of his life together into a whole, everything guided by a philosophy he calls "contest living."

My third passion has been politics. This also started early. Throughout my life, I had to struggle to suppress a desire to run for office myself.

Q: Let's discuss politics. You are one of the few titans in the Washington establishment who has never been high in government. Look at Bob Strauss, Sol Linowitz, Clark Clifford—all have been big in government. President Johnson once asked if he could appoint you to be mayor of the District of Columbia, but you turned him down. Why didn't you join the government?

A: I thought Johnson was going to ask me to be ambassador to the United Nations, but he surprised me. My wife was dead set against my taking any public job. She liked the security of my being in the private sector. But Johnson didn't ask me to take the UN post. He asked me to do a job I had no interest at all in doing, the mayor position.

I have been offered the directorship of the CIA twice, once by Gerald Ford, in 1975, and once by Ronald Reagan, in 1987. Bill Casey was sick but not yet dead when Reagan offered me the CIA. I was very tempted to take it. All things being equal, I would have. But I told the President I was facing surgery. I knew that the CIA directorship was one job you had to take hitting the ground running. I wasn't sure I could do that after the surgery. And that turned out to be correct. Right after he asked me, I went to Boston and got sick as hell, so I had to turn the job down.

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